

**Site of one of California's
twenty-one Franciscan
missions** 📍 **District head-
quarters for the northern
half of Alta California** 📍 **Rallying point for two
revolutions** 📍 **Site of an
international incident** 📍 **Staging, trade, and supply
center** 📍 **Locale of a fa-
mous bandit** 📍



**San Juan Bautista
State Historic Park
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9-96

SAN JUAN BAUTISTA

State Historic Park



CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS

At San Juan Bautista State Historic Park you can visualize, in one compact area, several successive phases of California history. During the Mexican period of California's history, San Juan Bautista served as the military and commercial center of the San Benito Valley. Many historic buildings representative of this exciting mix of cultures and events are preserved and restored here. Your visit will help you to understand some of the dramatic moments and some of the personal triumphs and disasters hidden behind the quiet scenery of the present.

THE MUTSUN

Prior to the Spanish occupation of California, the San Juan Valley was the home of the Mutsun Indians. In one of their villages on the eastern edge of San Juan Bautista, the Mutsun built beehive-shaped huts of willow and coarse grass.

The men, who often went naked in the mild climate, were hunters who made their spear points and arrowheads from chert and obsidian. Usually dressed in a pair of aprons, the women gathered acorns, berries and seeds to grind in stone mortars. The versatility of the baskets the women created is illustrated by their many uses: food storage; carrying loads; trap-

ping fish; leaching acorns....and when heated rocks were dropped into tightly woven, water-filled baskets they became cooking vessels, as well. They enjoyed ball games, field hockey, dice games, gambling, singing and dancing, and made music with bird bone whistles, flutes and rattles.

The last full-blooded Mutsun Indian, Mrs. Ascension Solarsano Cervantes, died in January, 1930 and is buried in the Indian Cemetery beside the old Mission church.

THE MISSION

The buildings facing San Juan Bautista's central plaza represent several periods of California history. The mission, founded in 1797, is the oldest. Padre Fermin Francisco de Lasuen located it here because there were many Indians in the area, and because it was about a day's walk from both Mission Santa Clara and Mission San Carlos Borromeo at Carmel. Excellent soil and a good water supply, as well as timber, rock and other building materials, were available nearby.

At one time some 1,200 Indians lived and worked at this mission; more than 4,300 are buried in the old cemetery beside the northeast wall of the mission church, along



with a number of Spanish Californians. The church itself, the largest of its kind in California, was started in 1803, and despite damage from numerous earthquakes it has been in continuous use since July 1, 1812. The altar wall was painted by Thomas Doak, a sailor who left his ship and is said to have been the first U.S. citizen to settle in Spanish California.

Today visitors may tour part of the mission, and historical artifacts and exhibits are on display. The buildings still belong to the Catholic Church and are not part of San Juan Bautista State Historic Park. Donations by visitors are used to offset the cost of keeping the mission open to the public.

EL CAMINO REAL

Next to the old stone wall below the cemetery, short section of *El Camino Real*—The King's Highway—can still be seen where it leaves the broad, flat plain and climbs diagonally up the hill to enter San Juan's central plaza. This is the highway that connected all of the California missions, and later served as one of California's major stage and wagon roads. Even today our modern highway system follows portions of the original route.

SAN JUAN DE CASTRO

After 1834 the town of San Juan, close beside the old mission, became known temporarily as San Juan de Castro. José Tiburcio Castro became the civil, or secular, administrator of the mission, and acting in accordance with the mission secularization decree issued that year, he divided the mission property and auctioned it off to friends, neighbors and relatives.

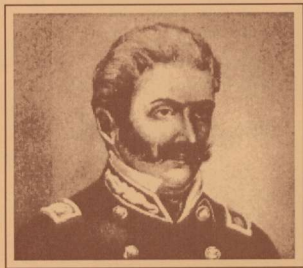
Castro House was built around 1838 at the request of his son José Maria Castro, who had become prefect of the northern district. It was intended to serve as the judicial and administrative headquarters of a district that included the entire northern half of Alta California. However, José Maria Castro was unable to spend much time there. After 1840, when he was cleared of charges of treason arising from an 1836 military revolt he led against Governor Juan Gutierrez, his military responsibilities required him to travel extensively.

In 1843 San Juan once again became the rallying point for a military revolt, as Castro organized friends and family into the force that overthrew and deported Governor Micheltorena. Later, he became commanding general of Mexican military forces in California, preoccupied with the threat of foreign invasion and with the many other problems caused by the flood of immigrants beginning to arrive in California.

THE GAVILAN PEAK AFFAIR

John C. Frémont and his company of U.S. "surveyors" had been allowed to winter in California provided they stayed away from the coastal settlements, but in March, 1846 they suddenly appeared in the hills near Monterey. Castro notified Frémont that he would have to leave California, but Frémont ignored the demand and led his men to the summit of Gavilan Peak, now known as Fremont Peak, overlooking San Juan. After three days, following an exchange of diplomatic (and some not-so-diplomatic) messages, Frémont decided to comply and withdrew— "slowly and growlingly" as he later described it.

On July 7, 1846, after the outbreak of war between Mexico and the U.S., Commodore Sloat landed his troops at Monterey and claimed California for the United States. In November of that year Frémont returned to San Juan Bautista, this time as a lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Army, and spent nearly two weeks here gathering horses, mules and supplies for his 428-man army. Known as the California Battalion, Frémont's little army left San Juan on November 28, 1846 and managed, despite considerable hardship, to meet with Andres Pico and sign a treaty with him—the Treaty of Cahuenga—thus ending armed hostilities between the U.S. and Mexico.



Jose Castro

CASTRO/BREEN ADOBE

Today, Castro/Breen Adobe, with its red tile roof and full-length balcony, looks much as it did when the Castros first built it. Inside, however, it has been furnished in both the 1870s style and the 1840s style when Castro owned the building.

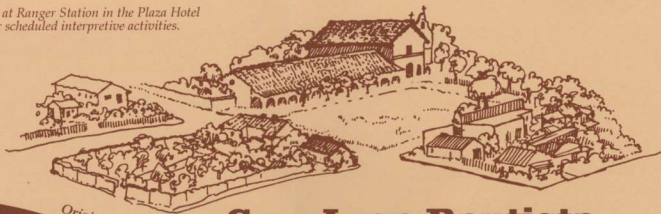
As members of the ill-fated Donner Party, Patrick and Margaret Breen, along with their seven children, had been stranded in the Sierra Nevada without supplies for 111 days during the extraordinary snows of 1846. It is said that they arrived penniless in San Juan and were given free shelter in the mission. Early in 1848, when word came that gold had been discovered in the Sierra foothills, one of the Breen children, 16-year-old John, set out for the goldfields and returned with about \$10,000 in gold dust.

In December, 1848, the Breens purchased the Castro adobe and 400 acres of prime agricultural land in the San Juan Valley. Thereafter—until 1933, when it became part of the State Historic Park—the old adobe building was occupied by succeeding generations of the Breen family.

Behind the Castro/Breen Adobe you will find a delightful garden and several large cast-iron caldrons. An interpretive panel shows how these tallow caldrons were used in the busy hide and tallow trade during the Spanish-Mexican period of California history.



Check at Ranger Station in the Plaza Hotel
for scheduled interpretive activities.



San Juan Bautista State Historic Park

Mission Cemetery

Original El Camino Real

Mission Church

Monastery Wing

Plaza

Vicky Cottage

Wash House

Plaza Hall

Restrooms

Blacksmith Shop

Plaza Stable

Second Street

Cabin

Plaza Hotel

Castro House

Mariposa Street

Washington Street

Franklin Street

Jail

Restrooms

Third Street

THE PLAZA HOTEL

Facing the plaza next to the Castro/Breen Adobe is the hotel that Angelo Zanetta built in 1858. It has been restored to look as it did in the 1860s, when the town of San Juan Bautista was an important stop on the stage route between Northern and Southern California.

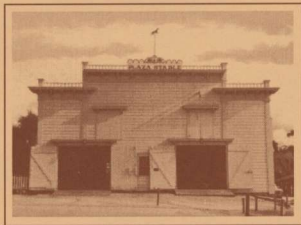
Zanetta, a professional restaurateur and hotel man, had already established a reputation for fine food and service in New Orleans, Monterey and San Juan hotels. In 1858 he purchased the land and the low-slung adobe buildings that stood next to the Castro adobe facing the plaza. The buildings had housed Spanish soldiers as early as 1813-14, but their walls were still solid.

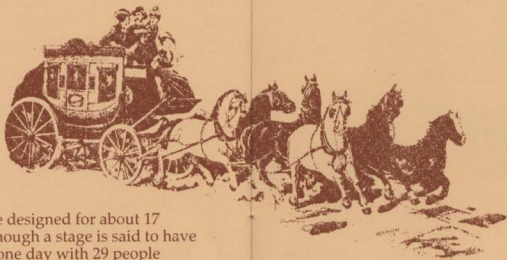


Zanetta added a wooden second story complete with balcony, sleeping rooms and other conveniences. The hotel's grand opening in January 1859 was widely advertised, and thereafter the hotel's dining room and bar quickly became famous for their fine food and drink. Zanetta's reputation as a genial host also spread far and wide.

PLAZA STABLE

Built about 1861 to handle the extensive stage and wagon traffic that was a central factor in San Juan's busiest years, the Plaza Stable was operated by a succession of men including John Comfort, a partner of Zanetta's who also operated the Plaza Hotel Bar. At one time there were seven stage lines operating through San Juan and up to eleven coaches arriving and departing daily. The bulk of the traffic was between San Francisco and Los Angeles, but San Juan was also on the main route between the San Benito Mountain quicksilver mines, Hollister, Watsonville, Monterey and Santa Cruz—and was the primary staging, trade and supply center for a wide area of cattle and sheep ranches.





Stages were designed for about 17 passengers, though a stage is said to have left San Juan one day with 29 people aboard. The stage driver was an important man, well paid and much admired. If he asked his passengers to get out and walk across bad spots in the road, or up steep grades—as often happened on the famous San Juan Grade just west of town—there was no room for argument.

Though the roads were continually being improved, heavy use by 4- and 6-horse teams made them extremely dusty throughout much of the year. It was natural, therefore, that as stages arrived in town, gentlemen would head for the barroom for a touch of something liquid to “irrigate their windpipes,” while ladies rushed for the restrooms to powder their noses and shake out their linen “dusters.”

In 1876 the railroad bypassed San Juan Bautista and the little town's boom years were over. The stable has been restored to its appearance of the 1870s when it was handling the well-groomed, well-matched teams of the Coast Line Stage Company. Inside, an assortment of carriages and wagons is on display along with harness and other items. Behind the stable is a blacksmith's shop with many of the tools used in the wagonwright trade.

PLAZA HALL

In 1868 Zanetta acquired another piece of property facing the plaza. The old adobe building on the property may have housed cavalymen, and even earlier served as a *monjerio* or dormitory for unmarried mission Indian women. Zanetta used the adobe bricks to form the ground floor of a two-story building that he hoped would become the county courthouse of newly established San Benito County.

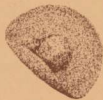
After Hollister was chosen as the county seat, the first floor of Plaza Hall was modified to serve as the residence of the Zanetta family, while the second floor was used for public meetings and celebrations. Laid over 30-foot-long redwood beams, the floor of the upstairs hall had good “spring” and therefore became famous as a dance floor. Many a grand ball was held there, as were political rallies, temperance meetings, traveling shows and gatherings of local groups such as the volunteer firemen.



Plaza Hall

TIBURCIO VASQUEZ

One of California's most famous outlaws was associated with San Juan during the 1860s and '70s. Born and raised in Monterey, Tiburcio Vasquez lived in San Juan for a time and had many friends in the San Benito and Gavilan Mountains around Hollister and San Juan. Like Joaquin Murrietta, Vasquez was a legend in his own time. He was said to have had a way with women and was widely considered a brave, cunning and, at times, gallant fellow. His activities, well-documented by witnesses and thoroughly reported by the newspapers of the time, made him a hero of sorts to Mexican Californios who many times helped him "outwit" law enforcement officers and their posses.



California State Park Information

For information about state parks hours of operation, fees, annual passes, or specific park regulations, you may contact your nearest state park. Please check the front of your telephone directory under *State Government, Department of Parks and Recreation*.

For general state parks information, contact the Information Office at P.O. Box 942896, Sacramento, CA 94296-0001 or call (916) 653-6995.

For camping reservations call DESTINET at (800) 444-7275.

For a California State Parks merchandise catalog, write to California State Parks Store, P.O. Box 942896, Sacramento, CA 94296-0001 or call (916) 653-4000.

Be sure to visit our State Parks Internet site at:

<http://www.ceres.ca.gov/parks/>



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Visitors with disabilities should contact the park office to inquire about current availability and accessible features to determine if they meet their specific needs.